

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: EAGR EINV OPIC CS

SUBJECT: INCREASING SENSITIVITY OVER FOREIGN LAND OWNERSHIP

SUMMARY: FOREIGN OWNERSHIP OF LAND IS ONCE AGAIN BECOMING A TOPIC OF CURRENT POLITICAL INTEREST IN COSTA RICA. A PROMINENT BISHOP HAS MADE A STRONG PUBLIC ATTACK AGAINST SELLING OUT COSTA RICA TO FOREIGNERS AND HIS VIEWS HAVE RECEIVED CONSIDERABLE SUPPORT IN THE PRESS AND FAVORABLE COMMENTS ON HIS STATEMENTS HAVE BEEN MADE BY THE PRESIDENT AND THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE. TODAY, THE PRESIDENT REPORTEDLY RECEIVED THE BISHOP AT A PRIVATE LUNCHEON.

PUBLIC PRESSURE OF THE KIND BEING GENERATED COULD LEAD TO LEGISLATIVE RESTRICTIONS ON FOREIGN LAND OWNERSHIP, AND A TIGHTENING OF REGULATIONS ON THE STATUS OF RETIRED FOREIGNERS. THE BISHOP'S STATEMENT ALSO ATTACKS THE ACTIVITIES OF MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS WHICH IT POTRAYS AS RAPACIOUS PURCHASERS OF COSTA RICA'S MOST PROSPEROUS INDUSTRIES, RATHER THAN AS THE CREATORS OF SUCH INDUSTRIES. END SUMMARY.

1. MONSIGNOR ROMAN ARRIETA VILLALOBOS, BISHOP OF TILARAN, HAS PRODUCED A STRONG AND SUPERFICIALLY PERSUASIVE ATTACK

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ON FOREIGN OWNERSHIP OF LAND AND OTHER SOURCES OF WEALTH

IN COSTA RICA. HIS ARTICLE, WHICH APPEARED IN LA NACION OF JANUARY 15, CONTAINED THE FOLLOWING MAIN POINTS:

- "DURING THE LAST FEW YEARS, NUMEROUS FOREIGN CITIZENS, MANY OF THEM STILL RESIDING IN THEIR COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN, HAVE DEDICATED THEMSELVES TO BUYING A LARGE PORTION OF OUR MOST FERTILE EARTH, OUR MOST PROSPEROUS INDUSTRIES, AND OUR MOST PROMISING SOURCES OF NATIONAL PRODUCTIVITY."

- "IN A RURAL SETTING THE INSATIABLE PURCHASE OF OUR WORKABLE LANDS LEADS TO TWO DISASTROUS CONSEQUENCES: 1) SOME PEASANTS, DAZZLED BY PRICES THAT THEY CONSIDER ATTRACTIVE BUT WHICH SUBSEQUENTLY TURN OUT TO BE RIDICULOUS, SELL THEIR LANDS AND GO TO THE CITY WHERE WITHIN A FEW MONTHS THEY SPEND THE MONEY AND FIND THEMSELVES REDUCED TO MISERY; 2) OTHER PEASANTS DESIRING TO REMAIN IN THE COUNTRY CANNOT DO SO BECAUSE THE PRICE OF LAND SUITABLE FOR AGRICULTURE AND CATTLE RAISING IS BEING INCREASED SO ARTIFICIALLY THAT IT MAKES IT IMPOSSIBLE TO ACQUIRE THE LAND UNDER CONDITIONS OF FAIR PROFITABILITY. THEY ARE LEFT WITH NO ALTERNATIVE BUT TO IMMIGRATE ALSO TO THE CITY (OBSERVE THE IMPRESSIVE ECCLESIASTICAL REASONING UNDER WHICH AT ONE AND THE SAME TIME PEASANTS ARE BEING PAID PRICES RIDICULOUSLY LOW FOR THEIR LAND AND PRICES SO HIGH THAT THE LAND CAN NO LONGER BE USED FOR AGRICULTURE AND IN EITHER CASE ARE BEING DRIVEN TO FLEE TO THE CITIES BY THE MACHINATIONS OF WICKED FOREIGNERS).

- "I WOULD NEVER MARCH IN THE RANKS OF THOSE WHO PROPOSE A FALSE NATIONALISM. BUT THE COUNTRY SHOULD IMMEDIATELY SEEK A METHOD OF BLENDING TOGETHER HARMONIOUS HOSPITALITY TO THE FOREIGNER AND THE SAFEGUARDING OF THE INALIENABLE RIGHTS OF ITS OWN SONS.

- AS MEASURES THAT IT APPEARS TO ME URGENT TO TAKE, I WOULD PROPOSE THE FOLLOWING: 1.) REFORM OF THE COUNTRY'S LEGISLATION CONCERNING BUYING AND SELLING LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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LAND TO PUT OVERALL LIMITS ON THE AMOUNT OF LAND THAT CAN BE IN FOREIGN HANDS AT ANY ONE TIME AND THE AMOUNT ANY FOREIGN CITIZEN CAN OWN; 2.) IMPOSITION OF LIMITS ON THE INVESTMENTS THAT FOREIGN CITIZENS OR ENTERPRISES CAN MAKE IN INDUSTRY, COMMERCE AND OTHER IMPORTANT SOURCES OF NATIONAL PRODUCTIVITY; 3.) REQUIRING THAT WEALTH GENERATED FROM OUR LAND AND OTHER SOURCES OF PRODUCTIVITY REMAIN MAINLY IN

THE COUNTRY AND BE INVESTED.

2. MONSIGNOR ARRIETA'S ATTACK ON FOREIGN OWNERSHIP HAS ATTRACTED CONSIDERABLE INTEREST LOCALLY AND FAVORABLE PRESS COMMENT. LA REPUBLICA CALLED THE BISHOP'S ARTICLE "ONE OF THE MOST VALIANT AND VALUABLE PIECES ON THE AGRARIAN PROBLEM." "IT CONCERNS," LA REPUBLICA ADDED, "A NOBLE POSITION IN DEFENSE OF OUR HOMELAND WHOSE BEST POSSESSIONS ARE THE BOOTY OF SOME POWERFUL FOREIGNERS WHO LITTLE BY LITTLE ARE SUBJUGATING US."

3. OFFICIAL COMMENT HAS BEEN LIMITED SO FAR, BUT PRESIDENT ODUBER'S ACTION IN INVITING THE BISHOP TO A PRIVATE LUNCHEON JANUARY 21 MAY LEAD TO FURTHER FAVORABLE OFFICIAL COMMENT. AGRICULTURE MINISTER GARRON REPORTEDLY TOLD THE PRESS, "IF THESE GENTLEMEN CONTINUE BUYING LAND IN COSTA RICA IN THE WAY THEY ARE NOW DOING, THEY ARE GOING TO TRANSFORM OUR NATIONALITY." HE ADDED, "I HAVE NOTHING AGAINST THESE PEOPLE FROM THE U.S. BUT THE PROBLEM IS THAT THEIR NUMBER IS VERY CONSIDERABLE." PRESIDENT ODUBER HAS REPORTEDLY STATED THAT HE IS ACCORD WITH THE BISHOP'S DECLARATION BUT HAS NOT COMMENTED ON IT IN DETAIL.
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